



POLICY AND YOU, THE NEW SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER

Now that you are on a school board, how will have a positive impact?

Setting policy is a primary responsibility of the local board of education, and contributing to the discussion on policy will enable you to have a positive impact on the schools.

A **policy** is a broad rule or a statement of belief. It guides the school district administration in managing operations. School boards adopt policies on a myriad of issues, ranging from curriculum and student discipline to staff conduct and the use of school facilities by community organizations.

For instance, most boards have a policy on the topic public statements. This policy authorizes the board president to speak for the board and requires the individual board members to emphasize when making statements, that they are speaking as an individual and not speaking for the board.

A typical policy manual often consists of 200 to 300 policies. Many districts and charter schools place their manuals, or certain key policies, online.

Bylaws are policies that govern the board's operation, such as voting methods.

Regulations The policy manual may also contain "regulations." Regulations provide detailed directions on how the school board's policies will be carried out. For example, a board's policy may call for communicating with the public via the district's website, while the regulations would provide greater detail, such as who has authority to place an item on the website, how to decide which items have priority, and what issues are appropriate for posting. Some boards take a vote to adopt regulations, while others leave the regulations in the hands of the superintendent, who is the district's chief school administrator.

Why do boards need Policy? Here are five reasons:

(1) **Extensive Law and Regulation** School boards must adhere to volumes of state regulations and a century's worth of education law. A local school board's policies and regulations can simplify and organize the extensive state-level requirements.

New Jersey statutes, the laws enacted by legislators, consist of four thick volumes – and that is just the state's education law (which is referred to as "Title 18A"). In addition, the New Jersey State Board of Education and the Department of Education write extensive regulations that detail how the statutes will be put into practice. The state's regulations are referred to as "New Jersey Administrative Code" (which is referred to as N.J.A.C. 6A). The school board's policies convey to administrators how you, as a board, want the district – and staff – to operate. It is essential for a school board to provide staff members with clear direction, rules and expectations.

(2) **Monitoring** The state Department of Education monitors specific policies, such as special education and affirmative action. As part of the moni-

toring system, NJQSAC (the New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum), state officials examine whether certain local school board policies are current. Charter schools undergo a renewal monitoring process.

- (3) **Clarity** Clear policies guide the board, promoting even-handed decision-making.
- (4) **Efficiency** Clear policies help the school board operate efficiently, avoiding the necessity to discuss the same topics over and over. The district's staff simply follows the board's policy.

How will you know if your board has good policies?

A good policy is clear, legal and workable. If a citizen, parent, student or staff member isn't sure what the policy means, then the policy is not clear. Also, a good policy incorporates and adheres to current laws. When school law changes, one or more policies will typically need updating. And finally, a good policy is workable, that is, it must be realistic and doable.

NJSBA can provide resources to assist local boards:

- **Critical Policy Reference Manual (CPRM).** The CPRM's sample policy language and legal references make it easy for a school board to add or revise policies. The manual – which is constantly reviewed and updated by NJSBA – includes information on nearly 200 topics essential to school governance.
- **Job Description Manual.** Whether your board is hiring a superintendent or head custodian, this resource provides the qualifications, reporting structures, job goals, scope of responsibilities, and citations to relevant law and regulation for many jobs in your district. Each sample description can be customized to meet your district's needs. The Job Description Manual is available online as a part of districts' dues-based services.
- **Policy Clearinghouse.** Over the years, NJSBA has amassed thousands of policies from school districts throughout New Jersey, and the nation. The samples in NJSBA's Policy Clearinghouse can provide local school boards with suggestions on how to best craft policies that are most effective for their community.
- **Update Your Policies.** NJSBA policy consultants can assist school boards in designing specific policies. In addition, the Association can help your board update its entire manual or place it online.
- **Policy on the Web.** The policy section of NJSBA's website offers numerous resources. To learn more, visit www.njsba.org/policy.
- **Contact us.** Contact NJSBA's Policy Department by phone or email. Call toll free at (888) 88-NJSBA, ext. 5254, or via email at policy@njsba.org. NJSBA staff can often find the information you need and send it to you by email on a same-day basis.

POLICY is the way you can have a positive impact for years to come.